

The Model Critic Reviews: Steps on Broadway

Posted on June 26, 2014



*The Steps Repertory Ensemble
Special Guest: Complexions Contemporary Ballet
Sidra Bell Dance NYC
The Alvin Ailey Citigroup Theatre
Reviewed by Carlos Stafford, The Model Critic*

STEPPING IT UP!

In a bright and varied evening of contemporary dance, Artistic Director, Bradley Shelver, bookended the evening, finishing with the fun and audacious piece, 3114 BCE.

With music from Ravel's Bolero, Shelver takes an amusing dip into Primitivism, and comically imagines how our ancestors might have cavorted in their caves. Clearly not a dance inspired by the Court of Louis XIV, but rather to more distant, teeming past, 4000 years earlier. The costumes consist of baggy, soiled underwear, early Calvin Klein. Makeup: perhaps Courtney Love inspired.

As the dancers thump across stage exposing breasts, grabbing genitals, humping and screaming, water plink-plonks off the cave's ceiling. What we have is a depiction of our early, good citizens, albeit with severe kyphosis, having a little Saturday night after-dinner soirée before dousing the torches. You could say it was just gore-juss!

Accompanied by Ravel's driving, mathematical cadences, the dancers forego their extensive barre training, and execute fast, challenging, asymmetrical movements to the swelling music. The ensemble was up to the task and delivered with amazing energy and precision. Appreciative cave bows followed! What we're left with is the presumed working theme—we are that; or shall we say, kind of like that, in 2-ply cotton.

“Flight” presented by Complexions Contemporary Ballet, and choreographer Jae Man Joo, was a fine surprise. Danced powerfully and with abandon by three male solo performers—Max Caserta, Terk Waters, and Philip Orsano. Like a good poem, no collective move was redundant; each gesture and intention illuminated a clarifying meaning—the strength of the human will through struggle. The trio, lifted and lean created dynamic movements of psychological tension and release, beyond words.

Two older works by renowned dance makers, William Forsythe and Elisa Monte held up brilliantly. “Limbs Theorem” by Forsythe created for the Frankfurt Ballet in 1990, was excerpted here, and danced en pointe by the versatile Katherine Sprudz, and partnered with picture clean aplomb by Landes Dixon. Together they delivered exciting artistry in this short, polished piece.

Monte’s “Pigs and Fishes” that premiered with the Ailey dancers in 1982, had an elemental trance-dance feeling, without narrative. Leading the dancers was expressive Carley Marholin and Lane Halperin, as other dancers filtered in to deliver a joyous, unselfconscious celebration to life. It quickly became apparent that the group dancing in unison had a power all its own. This dance was easy and fun, and required no thought from the audience since it reached another level of spirit beyond categories, as structure and composition fell away and was forgotten; not because they were not there, but because they became invisible. In essence, a dance that was simple, communal, and elemental, that appealed to the soul and senses and made you happy.

Shelver’s other piece opened the evening, and got everyone thinking on love.

“She and Him, Him and Her, He and I, Us and Them.” With masterworks by Bach,

Scarlatti, Chopin, and Beethoven, four evocative duets convey “Le Ronde” of love, each linked, interwoven in a complex of subtleties. With a voice overlay, a poem is recited in French, and we see lovers engage, sometimes repeating movements from previous couples, but with added uniqueness, underlying known and unknown sources and connections.

—I have wandered alone, sometimes with myself, and sometimes with Her, sometimes

with a thought of Him and Her, but always with an eye on the door, with an eye on goodbye.

—I will think about those musical moments moved by thoughts of fingers and toes, eyes and ears, Us and Them.

The ensemble was well rehearsed, and danced with unity, depth, and commitment.

This program was presented only on two successive nights. The Steps Rep Ensemble, however, is dynamically active in NYC, and worth catching next go-a-round.

Photo Credit: Nan Melville